



**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT
FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS**

PARENT COMMUNICATION

SEGMENT #3: TEACHER PREPARATION

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS

A project administered by

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Professional Development Toolkit for New and Beginning Teachers



The PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT FOR NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHERS is a research-based video streamed program with accompanying resource documents. The program is an outgrowth of a previous Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute (CEPI) online mentoring study at Virginia Commonwealth University. The findings of the online mentoring study revealed twelve topics new and beginning teachers felt additional university training would have led them to more effective use of best practices in the classroom. In this program, each of the twelve topics is presented in two to six stand alone video segments. The total number of segments is forty five. Suggested uses, in addition to personal viewing by K-12 teachers for self improvement, include professional development, mentor and mentee, university prospective teacher, and small or large group training.

The facilitators are university faculty and practitioners with field experience. Each is currently involved in teacher training or serves as a staff development administrator. All are currently engaged in educational research, teaching and/or educational policy development.

The teachers in the video programs are classroom teachers. Some of them were participants in the 2006 Online Mentoring Study in which the topics for this project were identified. They represent all disciplines in K-12 grades.

Resource documents for the programs are provided as PDF files to facilitate the use of the 45 video segments. The first set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) an introduction to program facilitators, including a definition of each topic, and a list of the video segments, and (3) a research formative study summary that helped to guide the project's development. The second set of documents is composed of: (1) a description of the project, (2) a full text transcript for each video segment, (3) a set of problems and solutions related to each video segment in the form of a work-study guide, and (4) an annotated bibliographic summary of references and Internet links for each transcript. Many of the organizations and agencies referenced in the transcripts are actively involved in the development of video and professional development presentations that support policy and advocacy.

Every reasonable effort is made to present current and accurate information. Internet content, however, does appear, disappear and change over time. CEPI, as a university-based educational policy research institute endorses no specific position of any listed group.

PARENT COMMUNICATION

SEGMENT #3: TEACHER PREPARATION

VIDEO SEGMENT TRANSCRIPT

Parent Communication: Communication strategies that can be used with parents to promote home and community support for student learning.

Facilitator: Dr. [Bill Boshier](#), Jr. Distinguished Professor
Educational and Government Leadership and School Improvement
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AUDIO	VIDEO
<p>New and beginning teacher orientation sessions are designed to help teachers prepare for successful teaching experiences. Preparation activities often include a review of local policies and protocol, state education policies, an introduction to the culture of the community, safety procedures, criminal policies, and a pile of information on a variety of topics and issues. Teacher induction activities and reading materials, coupled with conference and classroom preparation requirements, are often overwhelming especially to a new teacher who has re-located to a distant school and community or one who is a career switcher.</p> <p>I am Bill Boshier, Executive Director of the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute and Distinguished Professor of Public Policy and Education. In this segment, we will identify some of the state and local policies and procedures that are in place to protect and assist new or beginning teachers in Virginia.</p> <p>New and beginning teachers need to bring to the classroom an awareness of knowledge of the location of a variety of baseline information on a number of school-related issues. A teacher-to-teacher guide developed by the Office of School Improvement, Virginia Department of Education was prepared in 2006 to give practical advice and to provide information to new or beginning teachers.</p> <p>First, it lists sections of the State Code you should know about. These include the Standards of Quality, Standards of Accreditation, Standards of Learning, general powers of school boards, issues related to child abuse and neglect, and crime and criminal offences. While new and beginning teachers are not expected to commit these to memory or to have a full understanding of all details, an awareness of their existence and content is important.</p> <p>Second, it addresses local policy. Included are policies about suspension and expulsion, crisis management, student code of conduct, grievances, attendance policy, student records and confidentiality. Again, you may not know all details but these policies are important information for a teacher.</p>	<p>DR. BOSHER</p>

Third, it addresses what you should know about your students. Focus in this section is on the school's culture, dress code, activities and events, student extra curricular activities, before and after school care, gang activity, parent involvement level and services by external agencies.

A valuable part of this guide is a compilation of tips contributed by current educators. The teacher-to-teacher advice section includes comments such as:

1. Look around the corner. Before you make a decision to involve parents, make certain that you think about the consequences.
2. Look around the classroom. Before you say anything or take any action relating to parents, remember that someone may hear about it or hear it or see it. The age or video and audio recording is the present.
3. Prepare for conferences with parents. Be specific, ask specific questions, use reflective listening, stick to the topic and work toward a solution.

If you are a new teacher, your initial enthusiasm to teach is being tested just knowing that you should be awareness of all this information in addition to your mastery of subject matter. If you are a career switcher beginning teacher, you probably have been concerned already about time for your life beyond school.

Let's listen to some teachers as they talk about how they managed their school and personal lives while mastering policies, procedures, guidelines, and reading required materials the first years of teaching.

My name is Sharon Brown. I am a middle school teacher. I have taught for 1 year. I had to "step back and clear my head" often during my first year of teaching. I completed my last college endorsement requirements, wrote lesson plans, graded papers, taught each day, was a parent and served as a disciplinarian, more than I want to recall. I read policies and rules related to school and state issues. I was pretty well informed about such things as suspension, expulsion, and school conduct. I had to "step back and clear my head" as I learned that prioritization and organization are critical to teaching and to effective communication with parents. Being a first year teacher was challenging, but also rewarding. I knew teaching would be even more rewarding if I made it to the second year. Now that I am into my second year of teaching, I still need to "clear my head", but for new and less stressful reasons.

SHARON BROWN

My name is Andrew Givens and this is my fifth year of teaching. For the last four years I have taught at Wilder Middle School. I can remember during my first year I almost felt like I was underwater most of the time. Between the lesson planning, meetings, coaching, reading and daily stresses of dealing with students, I was going crazy. It seemed like every day something new came up or I found out about something that I was supposed to be doing. It often felt never-ending.

ANDREW GIVENS

The best advice I ever got from a veteran teacher was that you have to prioritize and keep a list of the tasks that must be completed. Try to complete your list every day.

Time management is essential. Make sure that the things you focus on most of the time are the ones that will help your students to succeed.

In order to help parents understand the policies and practices in which their children are learning, we have to understand them. Common knowledge about rules and regulations will give us a better opportunity for positive results.

DR. BOSHER



PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Ask yourself: How are you currently partnering with families and the community to improve learning in your classroom? What is going well? What would you like to change or improve in the future? What are you worrying about?

Suggested use for this module:

1. Analyze:

Please select one of the scenarios below and problem-solve a list of possible solutions. Record your ideas in the space provided. Discuss these ideas with your other educators (mentor, colleagues, or other beginning teachers).

2. View:

Watch the corresponding video on this topic. How does this information change your ideas?

3. Compare:

Revisit the scenario selected. Next, review the section entitled, "Possible Solutions" comparing the ideas listed with your own list.

4. Reflect:

How will you apply this new information to your current or future classroom? What goal will you set to help you begin to change your practices? What support is needed to help you accomplish this goal?

5. Apply:

List the first step towards change below. Create a timeline for success and place deadlines in your personal planner as a reminder. How will you know when you have met your goals?

Scenarios 1 & 2: Parent Communication

Scenario 1

A parent calls and emails constantly asking for information about upcoming events and probing for information about situations taking place in the classroom setting. Just yesterday, you replied to a request for field trip dates for the year and costs for the theatre assembly occurring next week. Another phone message arrives today while you are teaching science related to school supplies. How should you respond to this parent?

Scenario 2

As a beginning teacher, you recognize the need to partner with families to improve learning. You are attending evening activities and almost no parents are attending. Also, you have five parents who have not scheduled mandatory meetings for this year and are not responding to your note home. How can you meet the needs of all the families of your students?

Circle the scenario that you selected below:

Scenario 1

Scenario 2

Record a list of your own possible solutions here:

Summary & Goal Setting:

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Building Parental Involvement

Communication

- Always begin with the positive. Good news phone calls or postcards sent early in the year develop a positive relationship and provide families with timely and specific comments about their child.

- Newsletters, letters of notification, and materials should use language and vocabulary which are easily understood by all parents.
- As you design newsletters, consider the following tips:
 - ✓ Don't overwhelm. Families are likely to read something short and informational rather than a lengthy document. Try sending communications home every few weeks instead of a longer version four to five times a year.
 - ✓ Work collaboratively. Creating a joint newsletter with others on your grade level will divvy up the work load and increase the quality of your communications.
 - ✓ Spotlight student work. Consider including a one-page section which highlights cooperative learning projects or individual work. Rotate the students who are being showcased.
 - ✓ Create a standard newsletter format. Recurring columns or features makes your writing tasks much easier. Suggestions include: Calendar/ Upcoming Activities, Parenting Tips/Resources, 'Frequently-asked Questions' section, Instructional technique or weekly activity, Quotes or visuals, 'Don't Forget' section highlighting key event details, Special thanks, websites, and/or Volunteer Opportunities.
- Always hold conversations in appropriate locations (classroom rather than hallways).
- Send home a form at the start of the year which asks parents if they are willing to volunteer and in what capacity. Have a space for volunteers to work in and provide volunteers with meaningful tasks to complete (such as listening to children read or publishing writing).

Scheduling

- Days, times, and location of events are flexible to ensure that all parents can attend some of your events. Many parents may travel or work during the evenings, so occasional early morning and/or weekend activities invite all families to participate in school activities.

Parent Conferences

- Give parents plenty of notice when scheduling conferences. Smile and greet them at the classroom door. Thank the parent for taking the time to come and work together with the school.
- Begin conferences in a relaxed manner (consider coffee or refreshments) and be professional and understanding throughout the conversation. Start with something that is going well and then ask the parent to tell you more about their child. Often, parents will initiate or broach a difficult subject first making the conversation much easier to conduct. Consider sitting face-to-face next to one another rather than conducting the conference or meetings across a desk.
- If you are holding multiple conferences on a particular day, establish a waiting area outside the classroom with a couple of chairs and a conference schedule. This will prevent disruptions by parents who arrive early or at the wrong appointment time. Place photos of classroom projects, newsletters,

or a classroom-created book on the chairs to provide parents with something to browse while they wait.

- Make sure everything is graded and all assessments are up-to-date prior to scheduling your conferences. Demonstrate suggestions or concerns by 'showing' rather than 'telling'. For example, if you are concerned that a student is rushing through assignments, display a sample paper which serves as an example of this concern. Always have a copy of previous report cards to refer back to as needed during the conference.
- Let your parents know that you are willing to stop and answer questions at any point along the way. Listen and find positive points throughout the conversation.
- Create a file folder with copies of sheets addressing typical concerns (reading strategies, homework help, curriculum overviews, school calendars) at your conference table. During the conference, it will then be easy to pull out and distribute these forms as needed.
- Be respectful and end on time. Families may have childcare or other meetings. Sticking to your schedule will benefit everyone.
- End the conference by reviewing one or two key points for improvement as well as a student strength. Some schools use a parent meeting form to document progress and suggestions during conferences. If you are summarizing the content of your meeting on a form, have the parent sign it and provide a copy right away for them to take home. This allows the parent to leave with the critical information in hand and eliminates the need to remember to copy and send the form home at a later date.

ANNOTATED RESEARCH BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ❖ Parents of culturally diverse students can be an untapped resource in today's classrooms. Care should be taken to keep parents informed through communication.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah J. (2005). *What successful mentors do*. CA:Corwin Press, p. 177.

- ❖ Allow students to work in small groups to preview their homework assignments to ensure that all understand the assignment. This also helps parents who may not be able to read the assignment in English.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah. (2005). *What successful mentors do*. CA:Corwin Press, p. 177.

- ❖ As a "new teacher on the block," try to talk to others familiar with the student before making calls or planning conferences with parents.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah. (2005). *What successful mentors do*. CA:Corwin Press, p. 183.

- ❖ Being organized and prepared in advance of the parent-teacher conference with potential solutions to the problems a teacher expects to hear can reap rewards with increased communication and rapport with parents.

Hicks, Cathy; Glasgow, Neal & McNary, Sarah J. (2005). *What successful mentors do*. CA:Corwin Press, p. 183.

- ❖ Teachers say parents may not make the first move but generally will respond when asked to help at home or play role in the classroom. Some teachers involve parents in academic activities such as reading and tutoring, while other teachers turn to parents to relieve them of duties that otherwise would get in the way of teaching.

Become a teacher: survival guide for new teachers. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2007, from <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/become/about/survivalguide/parent.html>

- ❖ Contact parents early before a problem occurs, particularly when there's good news to report.

Become a teacher: survival guide for new teachers. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2007, from <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/become/about/survivalguide/survguide.pdf>

- ❖ Address parents' concerns head on. If you are taking a pedagogical approach that raises questions, work to show parents the benefits of your methods and explain your reasoning to them.

Become a teacher: survival guide for new teachers. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2007, from <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/become/about/survivalguide/parent.html>

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